

# WORKERS

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## THE FIGHT FOR HEALTH

**Ambulance crisis in London... Three big lies about student nurses and midwives... Inequity and ill health**

**SYRIA** Stop the bombing!

**UNION BILL** How to defeat it

**CUBA** Exclusive interview

**DEFICIT** Dumped on us

*plus* News,

Historic Notes

and more

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# WORKERS

## “ Stop the bombing of Syria!

DAVID CAMERON has got his way, and the RAF is bombing Syria. We will all live to regret the despicable vote in parliament which saw the bombing authorised. MPs voted for invasion and death. Then they laughed.

Meanwhile, Tornado jets were waiting for the vote to fly off to bomb Syria. The next day, shares in armaments companies surged. BAE Systems, part of the consortium which makes the Tornado jets, leapt 4 per cent. In the month after the Paris terror attacks in November, BAE shares went up 13 per cent. There's always money in war.

Cameron's motivation is clear: to sabotage the progress that Syria, aided by Russia, has been making against ISIS, because he – as part of NATO – wants to shore up the Syrian “opposition”, much of which is jihadist too.

What, though, are we to make of the Labour Party? Before the vote we warned on [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk) about “weak-willed” moves to promote a free vote among Labour MPs. And that is precisely what happened.

Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, desperate to maintain their charade of authority, backed down in the face of opposition not of the people, nor of Labour Party members, but from inside the shadow cabinet.

Rather than stand on principle and fight for

peace, they chose to save their own skins – for the moment – by accepting a free vote which they knew would lead to a government majority. Let Syria be bombed as long as their inept leadership survives for another week or month.

They had a chance to actually stop Britain going to war, and they bottled it.

A new kind of politics? Some might say it's even more hypocritical and even less effective than the old. After all, it was Ed Miliband who enforced a three-line whip and secured a majority against war in Syria in August 2013.

Britain's bombing of Syria is a clear breach of international law. Nothing in the recent UN Security Council resolution justifies this intervention. Others have shown this in great detail. But what does NATO care for international law?

The British government refuses to involve the Syrian government. Instead its only answer is to drop bombs on Syria without permission from the government of that nation – a government recognised by the UN. It is, in effect, an invasion, and one that risks conflict with Russia and Iran, both operating with the consent of Syria.

Only the Syrian government can defeat Islamic State in Syria. This is the only road to peace in Syria, not illegal air strikes. Stop British air strikes in Syria! ■



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## Last deep mine closes

THE DECISION to close Kellingley Pit, the last of Britain's deep coal mines, sounds the death knell not only for coal mining but electricity generation from coal. This was hastened by Chancellor George Osborne's doubling of the charges for carbon emissions from electricity generation from April 2015 and the government's announcement that it wants to abandon all electricity generation from coal.

This is done with the pretence of a commitment to climate change. But the switch from coal to gas generation will be cosmetic and is solely to pander to so-called green votes. Significantly anti-coal campaigners ignore the value of Britain's coal reserves, all mineable and useable if investment in clean coal technology were advanced.

Instead the government abandoned its £1 billion prize competition to provide carbon capture and storage technology. This would have created a world-wide market for the use of clean coal. And anti-coal campaigners have entered into a pact with the Devil in the form of international banking. They have created a league of over 21 banks pledged never to invest in coal or clean coal technology. In the name of ethical banking, finance capital attempts to murder the lynchpin of the industrial revolution – coal.

Further issues must be examined arising from the closure of Kellingley and soon Ferrybridge, Eggborough and Drax power stations. The shattering of the link between Britain's coal industry and electricity supply industry by privatisations under Thatcher destroyed the concept of both nationalised industries and also a planned, integrated and multi-faceted energy plan for Britain.

Britain's ability to control its own energy resources, its own supplies and its own ability to plan for the future has now been put in jeopardy. At fault are the division and subsequent competition between differing fuels used for the generation of electricity, the establishment of a market in electricity supply and the subsequent selling of British ownership to foreign companies and states. And governments that think they can import their way out of anything, from natural resources to labour.

The dash to gas, dependent on foreign supplies, has diverted vast profits to the company owners and wasted a finite resource. Indecision over constructing replacement nuclear generation has seen costs spiral over the past 20 years. The public will pay double and triple for this investment as politicians of all parties have flaunted their hesitation and cowardice.

The now closed coalfields of Yorkshire and North East England have dominated the Vale of York and River Ouse for nearly 60 years, along with their associated giant power stations, Drax, Eggborough and Ferrybridge. Their closure and demolition, if not decommissioning and transfer to China for reconstruction, will change the landscape of the North forever. And yet there is still the increasing likelihood of power cuts as the physical ability to generate and the number of power stations available lags behind growing demand. ■

**If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or email [workers@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:workers@cpbml.org.uk)**

## LABOUR, INC.

### Welcome to the board

ALISTAIR DARLING, the former Labour chancellor, has been appointed to the board of directors at Morgan Stanley, the US-based financial services firm. Darling is a prominent member of the campaign backing Britain to remain within the EU.

Gordon Brown is to join global investment firm Pimco's advisory board, joining an ex-chairman of the US Federal Reserve and an ex-president of the European Central Bank. Brown announced earlier this year that he was bowing out of Westminster politics at the May election and would instead focus on charity work and his role as a United Nations envoy. Not true, was it?

Anyone want more proof that the parliamentary Labour Party is just part of the establishment, an arm of the capitalist state? ■

## CO-OP

### Campaign accounts shut

THE CO-OP Bank has closed the accounts of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. The action follows on the heels of the closure of 20 accounts held by British pro-Palestine groups, and is thought to be linked to the bank's takeover two years ago by American hedge funds.

In a statement, the campaign said: "We have banked with the Co-op for over 20 years and the bank was chosen as it presented itself as an 'ethical' bank linked to community and human rights organisations. Their recent unilateral action has jeopardised our finances and our campaigning capacity." Other groups' funds are now thought to be at risk. ■



## ON THE WEB

A selection of additional news at [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk)...

### Student nurses and midwives in bursary protest

War abroad, war at home. As parliament was debating the bombing of Syria, less than 100 yards up Whitehall student nurses and midwives were standing outside the Department of Health in a loud and lively protest against plans to scrap their bursaries.

### Rail unions unite over driver-only trains

In a significant move, rail unions ASLEF and RMT have agreed a joint statement opposing the operation of trains without a guard – a direct response to plans to operate new inter-city trains with drivers only. The statement comes at a time when the rail industry has identified boarding and alighting from trains as a major risk area that needs to be tackled.

### Doctors show the way

Junior doctors have forced health secretary Jeremy Hunt to go to Acas without precondition.

### Sheffield rally urges action to save steel

Steel workers from across Britain demonstrated in the “steel city” of Sheffield demanding urgent government action to save the industry.

### Hunt misses every target

The NHS in England continues to miss many key targets, such as those for emergency responses and cancer care. A&E departments face a “perfect storm” this winter.

### Plus: the e-newsletter

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Chris Sampson (CC BY 2.0)



**Kellingley Colliery, Yorkshire – the last deep coal mine in Britain, now to be closed. See article, page 3.**

## Postal workers walk out

NO LAW can restrain workers when they choose to ignore it. In Bridgwater, Somerset, Post Office workers at the delivery office walked out on 11 November without a ballot in protest at the dismissal of a colleague suffering from multiple sclerosis and who is profoundly deaf – the employer had tried numerous dirty tricks to stop the member from returning to work. They returned to work the next day, and in December the Communication Workers Union was able to announce his reinstatement.

It’s not the only recent lightning action from postal workers in the south west. On 26 October some 200 Post Office workers in Plymouth, Devon, at the city’s West Park and North Central delivery office “just walked out” after turning up for work to find that a number of agency workers had been taken on in breach of the national Agenda for Growth agreement with the Communication Workers Union.

In part, the purpose of the agreement is to increase the number of hours worked by part-time workers (22-hour contracts are “normal”) before resorting to the use of agency labour. The dispute has since been resolved but again, the law was not invoked.

Figures covering days lost due to strikes do not include “unofficial” stoppages. These disputes are rarely reported outside of the local media.

This kind of lightning action exposes a weakness in anti-union legislation. To attack (sack) those who have walked out, an employer must first request any union involved to repudiate the action. But by the time this is done workers will have returned to work: hit and run, effective guerrilla action. ■

• See also “How to defeat the Bill”, page 13

## BORDERS

### Brussels bids for power

THE EU is proposing a radical extension of its powers over member states, with plans to take over control of their borders in “emergencies”. It is using the migration chaos to call for EU countries to agree to a 2,000-strong European border and coastguard force which would operate separately from, and without approval from, the affected country.

The EU force would replace the individual country’s powers to police its frontiers, deal with asylum claims, and detain and deport failed asylum claimants. Germany and France have already backed it. The regime would operate across the 26-country Schengen area and include non-EU countries such as Switzerland and Norway, but not non-Schengen Britain and Ireland.

The huge number of migrants into

Europe this summer has triggered the effective collapse of the free-movement Schengen agreement. Some members have refused to agree to diktats from the likes of Germany about how many migrants they should allow to settle within their borders. The first fences between two Schengen states – Austria and Slovenia – went up in early December. So, as usual with the EU, where threats fail, the sovereign power to decide is to be removed.

At present, the EU frontiers agency, Frontex, can only operate with agreement from national governments. For months, Greece has resisted the threat of involvement of Frontex in its migration crisis. It has now caved in.

Greece and Italy are under pressure to create large detention camps to hold asylum seekers while their claims are considered. Italy has pointed out that it could end up with more asylum detainees than the national prison population. ■

# ‘Incoherent’ teacher plans

THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED Ofsted annual report for 2014-15 hit the headlines because of the Chief Inspector’s comments about local authorities in England and Wales that persistently fail to raise standards.

One reason behind long-standing problems is the difficulty in recruiting teachers. The Chief Inspector wrote “It has now come to pass that weaknesses in teacher supply are having a material impact on the ability of schools...to recruit the teachers and leaders that they need if pupils are to receive the quality of education that they deserve.” In other words, the government’s untried and untested fragmentation of the initial teacher training system has cut teacher supply.

The school population is rising rapidly, particularly in London and the larger cities where school place shortages are causing major disruption. Much of this is because of uninhibited, rapid inward migration from other EU countries. Migration from the rest of the world and, on the margins, asylum seekers and refugees, accounts for some of the rise too. No one can plan for uneven and unknown population changes without planning for migration.

There is also a massive, continuing problem in recruiting and retaining teachers. The government response is ineffective. It announced plans to introduce a task force of 1,500 teachers to parachute into areas of acute shortage. It hasn’t explained where it can conjure those staff from – or what happens when they move on.

The Department for Education’s own statistics show that in the year to November 2014, 50,000 qualified teachers left the state sector. They have to be replaced even before coping with more pupils. But recruitment of students into initial teacher training is below the government target. It stands at only at 82 per cent for secondary recruits and is far worse in some subject areas.

The government target is in any case inadequate to plug the gap. The latest estimates suggest that by 2022, there will be an additional 800,000 students in secondary schools. Even now schools all over the country have to make temporary arrangements to cover secondary specialist subject teaching.

Around 28 per cent of head teachers surveyed by Ofsted in “non-challenging circumstances” said that they had to make temporary arrangements to cover maths or science teaching. For heads in “challenging circumstances” the number making temporary arrangements was over 60 per cent.

Governments have been keen to use data to pick out “poor” schools, teachers and local authorities. It’s time to turn the tables. The Ofsted report has the evidence about this government’s poor performance. It has overseen an incoherent mix of routes into teaching. Allied with its disregard of the numbers leaving the profession and the effect of migration, it has created a crisis in education. Our young people will not have the teachers they need unless this changes. ■

## LOCAL GOVT

### Pay talks under way

THE 2016 LOCAL government pay negotiations are under way. Unite, GMB and Unison gird their loins for a battle.

After the fiasco of the 2014 and 2015 badly termed “disputes” Unison undertook a farcical process – after which lay member sentinels were attached at all levels of the union’s negotiating structure. They have to make sure those dreadful full-timers don’t march them up to the top of the hill, then down again like the Grand Old Duke of York. 2016 promises to be even more ridiculous with these armchair tacticians in charge.

Such is their obsession with the Living Wage that they lodged a pay claim last summer based upon making it the minimum rate, with a £1 per hour flat rate increase for

anyone already earning above it. Something like 60 per cent of staff in local government would get only the flat rate rise as they already receive the Living Wage, its equivalent or better. Despite this, the claim – with its focus on the Living Wage – signals that their rise is not important.

Twenty-five of London’s 32 boroughs already pay the Living Wage. Six of Unison’s 12 regions already have 50 per cent of workers on or above the Living Wage. So after all the hot air the joint trade unions, again, are effectively only bothered about an increase for a minority.

A recent survey of local government workers indicated that pay was fifteenth in their list of priorities. There are likely to be calls for an industrial action ballot early in the New Year which is likely to give further ammunition to the government and its Trade Union Bill – highlighting low ballot returns for strike action. ■

## WHAT’S ON

### Coming soon

#### FEBRUARY

Thursday 11 February, 7.30 pm

“The War on Workers: How to Turn the Tide”

Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL



#### CPBML Public Meeting

In the face of capitalism’s blitzkrieg on workers, our class needs to radically change and refresh its thinking – to realise it can rejoin class struggle and take Britain forward. Come and discuss how. All welcome.

## INDUSTRY

### Output falls

MANUFACTURING OUTPUT fell by 0.4 per cent in October. This continues the consistent decline of the manufacturing sector throughout 2015. Overall industrial production is still nearly 9 per cent below its level before the 2008 crash. ■



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# In November the Care Quality Commission gave the London Ambulance Service its lowest rating. What's going on? And what is the

## Ambulance emergency

THE LONDON Ambulance Service (LAS) is the busiest ambulance service in Britain, quite possibly in the world, and it provides healthcare that is free to patients. It is also the only London-wide NHS trust.

It employs over 4,500 staff, who work across a wide range of roles from out of 70 ambulance stations and other sites. It provides emergency and non-emergency cover to more than eight million people who live and work in the capital 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. It is a huge service by any stretch of the imagination.

It is a public sector trust at the heart of the NHS and has a long history of trade union organisation. Unison is the main union with over half of the workforce in membership.

### Response times

The LAS has been struggling to meet its response time targets. Over the last couple of years it has gone from having the best ambulance service response times in the country to, in 2015, the worst. Since May 2014 LAS has failed to meet its 75 per cent target for Category A calls (most serious) within 8 minutes.

This decline in performance was seen as so serious that the NHS Trust Development

### 'Caring and professional staff led by an inadequate management.'

Authority was called in to supervise and help manage a recovery. This recovery has not happened.

"Decline in performance", though, needs some qualification. Response times may have fallen, but the number of calls responded to has risen steadily, year on year. And while call volume increases, resources, measured in the number of staff, have been reduced due to the government's decision to reduce funding. Who then gets the blame? The government? Not on your nelly – the LAS of course!

In June 2015 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) paid a five-day visit to the service. The CQC is the independent regulator of health and social care in England.

Its report, published on 27 November 2015, does not make good reading for the

LAS, the staff or the people of London. The overall assessment and rating is 'Inadequate'! (The ratings the CQC has at its disposal are Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate.)

The saving grace, as always, were the workers. The CQC acknowledges that staff were "overwhelmingly dedicated, hardworking and compassionate". Importantly, Caring and the care given by staff was rated as "Good". The CQC said staff were "caring and compassionate, often in very difficult and distressing circumstances". This was the highest rating obtained by the LAS.

More telling was the rating given to the senior management and leadership of the service, part of the category of "Well Led". The overall rating was "Inadequate".

And there's the rub. Caring and professional staff led by an inadequate management. The report calls management "remote and lacking an understanding of the issues that they (staff) were experiencing".

### No surprise

None of this should come as a surprise. In 2011 the coalition government announced £20 billion cuts to the NHS. The share that the London Ambulance Service had to take was a £53 million cut in funding over five years. £53 million of cuts which resulted in 980 or so job losses. That is £10 million of funding removed from the service each year.

The Unison regional organiser, interviewed on TV in 2011, predicted that these cuts would lead to dire consequences within five years. The interview can be seen at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-13051798>

Recruitment was stopped. Paramedic training was halted or severely reduced. Not surprisingly the LAS struggled (not helped by poor leadership and management by a newly appointed chief executive and executive team at that time).

But the struggle in the main was because of lack of funds, lack of training and lack of staff. The service was set up to fail. In the battle between public and private, it wouldn't hurt the government's case to see the biggest ambulance service fall.

Staff, particularly the highly trained paramedics, started to leave the service. This was for a number of reasons; pay,

## Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of London public meetings in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL, continues on 11 February with the title "The War on Workers: How to Turn the Tide". The meetings will take place in the Brockway Room, which can accommodate more people than the room previously used. Other meetings are held around Britain. Meeting details will be published on What's On, page 5, and on [www.cpbml.org.uk/events](http://www.cpbml.org.uk/events).

**M** The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays. There are also CPBML May Day meetings in Edinburgh and Leeds.

**M** As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or send an email to [info@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk)

## on Ambulance e way forward?



**The capital's ambulance service will survive as long as the agenda put forward by workers is met.**

pressure, stress, a feeling of bullying and poor leadership. In their place the LAS recruited from, among other places, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand.

More and more staff left. It became a vicious circle.

Unison wrote to the then chief executive in November 2014 expressing its concerns,

to implore the senior management to act and take the initiative in turning the service around before it was too late.

There has been a major issue regarding the pay of paramedics – one that the London Ambulance Service has ignored. The simple fact is that other ambulance services were paying paramedics a pay band

higher than those employed by LAS, and for less stressful (and less!) work.

LAS staff voted with their feet and went to join these services, which often covered the areas where they lived – meaning it was easier for them to work outside London as well as more lucrative.

The staff of the LAS are not inadequate, and Londoners know that.

The inability of LAS management to stand up to the government, combined with the provocative decision to bring in troops to break the last pay strikes in the service, led directly to the previous chief executive leaving.

The decision of the current chief executive to bring in the Defence Medical Services – the equivalent of bringing in the troops – to “provide leadership training and an education programme using military planning tools” points to a refusal to learn lessons that may yet bring the end of another senior career.

Unison has called for a period of stability, restoration of funding to pre-“austerity” levels, and immediate regrading of paramedics. If this workers’ agenda is met, the service will survive. Watch this space. ■

## Union prophecy proved right

FOR A TELLING prophecy, read this from a Unison Branch Secretary letter in 2014: “The trickle of staff leaving that we saw nine months or so ago has developed into a tidal wave. A tidal wave that, if not stopped, will take our Service down.

“If this trend continues, the reduction of front line staff – currently we have around 300 fewer staff available over the Christmas and New Year period (2014) – will be exacerbated to the point where none of our targets can be met, and lives will be lost....They do not want to work in this atmosphere of crisis, compounded by good people giving up on the Service.

“I do not believe that we are a failing Service, but I do think that we are a falling Service. Falling from one crisis to the next. Falling unrelentingly from the position that we, as the Capital City’s Ambulance Service, should be. And, more worryingly, falling into the inevitable spiral that will, in a short time, turn falling into failing.”

Add to that the fact the LAS is a service which has been failed – failed by a government that did not want the service to succeed, an aim so perverse most would not credit it. That letter is still relevant a year on. ■

How can Britain be short of nurses and midwives and yet cut? The answer is simple: like the imperialists they are, the government plans to

# Three big lies in the attack



Workers

2 December 2015: Midwifery and nursing students demonstrate outside the Department of Health in Whitehall, London.

THERE ARE MANY ways to attack a profession but the most effective is to attack the new recruits coming into the ranks. First there was Jeremy Hunt's attack on junior doctors. Then the government spending review in November 2015 claimed to be "spending more money" on the NHS when it actually contained a proposal to remove £1.2 billion each year.

Health Education England, an "arm's length" body of the Department of Health currently provides £1.2 billion for the tuition fees and bursaries of nursing, midwifery and other Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) such as physiotherapists. The government proposes that from September 2017 all such health students would have to apply for a loan to cover tuition fees and maintenance.

Those graduating in 2020 face projected debts of £51,600.

Nazi propaganda used the maxim that if you tell a lie big enough and often enough, people will come to believe it (coined by Hitler, often attributed to Goebbels). In this case it is three big ones.

## Lie 1. The 'new money'

Firstly, a huge slice of the supposed "new money" for the NHS mentioned in the review is a direct transfer from the pockets of future health care students or their parents to the Treasury.

It is estimated that those students or their families will be repaying the debt for over 30 years. Given the addition of interest

payments, this is a most uneconomic way of funding an essential workforce.

## Lie 2. 'Treated just like other students'

The second big lie is that nurses, midwives and AHPs will be pleased to be "treated just like other students". Just one problem: they are not like other students. Their academic year is much longer with the combination of placement hours and study weeks, and these are in the workplace. Take nursing: the number of hours in the workplace is specified by the nursing regulator, the Nursing and Midwifery Council. They spend over 2,300 hours in the workplace during the typical three-year programme.



back on training places and support? The answer is to rob other countries by importing their trained specialists...

# Back on health students

**'The third and the biggest lie of all is that fees and the attack on the bursary will lead to more students.'**

In order to learn, students are expected to be working under supervision and thus the spending review proposal means they would be taking on the massive debt and working the typical 12-hour shifts for no pay. The constraints of their programme mean they do not have the opportunity other students may have to undertake part time work.

### **Lie 3. That it would lead to an expansion of training**

The third and the biggest lie of all is that this imposition of tuition fees and attack on the bursary will lead to more student nurses, midwives and AHPs joining the professions. The government points out that currently there are more applicants than funded places. It argues that universities would be "free" to expand the number of training places available. That completely ignores the deterrent effect of large debts on the individual student. The average age of student nurses is 29 years; they would be taking on a debt lasting the whole of their working life.

The government also ignores that hundreds of health students undertake their qualification after graduating in another area and, under its own rules, cannot access the student loans system again. In any event, they could not contemplate a second loan!

Universities are entirely reliant on the NHS and other health services to provide those practical training placements and nursing staff with the additional qualification to assess students. But these resources are already in short supply and overstretched. Indeed under the new proposals, maybe the

universities will have to pay the NHS and others for these placements. Where would the madness end?

### **Fighting back**

Within days of the announcement student nurses and midwives were on the streets protesting. Indeed on 2 December as parliament was debating the bombing of Syria, less than 100 yards up Whitehall student nurses and midwives were standing outside the Department of Health in a loud and lively protest against the plans. Then on 8 December they joined other students on the national demonstration about the cost of education. The message from students is very clear: "I would not have been able to join this profession if these proposals were in place."

The other sentiment which captures the mood of the student body, the wider profession and the public is that "this is just wrong". It's summed up by the statement on the Royal College of Midwives website: "Debt upon debt upon debt. And all so you can join the NHS, help the country and help drive down that midwife shortage. It doesn't seem right that someone who will spend a lifetime caring for women and delivering NHS care should have to pay tens of thousands of pounds just to do so. It's just wrong."

The proposal is subject to a period of consultation. A parliamentary petition is due to be presented on 11 January and a further public demonstration is planned. The students are busy coordinating their action via a Facebook page. They show the same

energy and humour seen in the junior doctors' campaigning tactics.

This fight impacts on all health professions and demands a wider response. It affects nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, podiatry, radiography, dietetics, orthoptics, operating department practice and prosthetics. It may also affect paramedic courses. It also involves the health educators of all those professions, typically members of the University and College Union (UCU), which is opposed to tuition fees. The need for all these forces to combine has never been more urgent.

One place where support will not be forthcoming is from the university employers. For some years they have been aggrieved that the funding for health courses (a transfer of taxpayers' money from one government department to another) has not been meeting the costs. So they have welcomed charging fees as an improved alternative. They have even pointed out to prospective students that loans will give them more "cash in hand" than a bursary!

The current proposals have not arrived out of the blue. They are part of a cynical and much wider plan for Britain to avoid taking responsibility for its own workforce planning in the NHS. This continues a long pattern of immoral poaching of qualified staff whose training has been funded at the expense of their country of origin.

In the current period where it is common

*Continued on page 10*

## **Organised chaos: a timeline**

September 2013	20 per cent reduction in London of nurse training places. Smaller reductions in other institutions across Britain
November 2015	Nursing added to the Shortage Occupation List to ease migration of nurses to UK from outside the EU
December 2015	Government spending review announces plan to abolish bursary and replace with loans for tuition and maintenance for UK students
January 2016	Introduction of European Professional Card for EU nurses which allows qualifications to be checked in country of origin only
September 2016	Reduced flow of British nurses enter the labour market reflecting the September 2013 reduction in places

*Continued from page 9*

to hear voices raised that all migration is a “good thing”, the alternative view that migration is theft of skill from other countries must be heard.

The avoidance of workforce planning in the NHS has a long history and has led to periods of restricted training opportunities followed by limited expansion when the need was dire. The current circumstances are more acute as the period of contraction has not been followed by any expansion.

In Britain the government-backed Centre for Workforce Intelligence predicts the NHS will be short of at least 47,500 nurses by 2016. The most recent period of sharp contraction followed the election of the coalition government in 2010 which saw the Department of Health agree to significant reductions in numbers in training.

In London with its sharply rising population this led to a decision to reduce the September 2013 intake by 20 per cent. In fact the University of West London lost its contract to offer any nursing programmes in that contract round.

The lunacy of the proposal was highlighted by all the nursing unions. The UCU opposed it too, also having to fight redundancies of nursing lecturers as a result of the proposal. Originally there were plans for further reduction in 2014 and 2015 but these

did not proceed, so a small victory. However, the acute position predicted for 2016 is a direct result of the decision to reduce places three years ago.

### Poach from outside the EU

The shortage of nurses is part of a world-wide shortage as documented by the World Health Organization. For example the health ministry of India has recently identified that they have a shortage of 2.4 million nurses. This has not stopped Theresa May in November 2015 agreeing to place nurses on the “shortage occupation list”, thus easing the immigration rules and allowing employers to recruit (at great expense) outside of the European Economic Area. See Box, right, for the impact on India, for example.

Adding nursing to the list in the month before announcing the changes to UK nursing education in the spending review was probably a deliberate ploy to dampen NHS employers’ reaction to the proposal.

### Poach from EU countries

Recent years have seen a steady flow of EU nurses joining the UK nursing register. The impact on other European countries has been marked. In 2015 the Spanish Council of Nursing president Dr Máximo Jurado complained about British recruitment agencies, telling BBC News: “They lie – they fool nurses.” Likewise the vice-president of Portugal’s nursing regulator, Dr Bruno Gomes, has complained about British recruitment in his country.

The National Nursing Research Unit at King’s College London has highlighted that this overseas workforce is very unstable, with many returning home following NHS expenditure on their recruitment, orientation and induction. Yet the trend is set to continue and intensify with a new EU initiative.

From January 2016, a new “European professional card” will be introduced for many health professionals. This means Britain will be reliant on regulators in other European countries to make sure those coming to work here have the correct documents and qualifications. The card will apply initially to nurses, pharmacists, and physiotherapists and it is planned to apply to doctors from 2018.

This initiative has not received significant

## India’s loss

BEFORE THERESA MAY added nursing to the shortage occupation list (SOL) the Indian Health Ministry was expecting to gain from the implementation of her previous immigration rules which had been due to take effect on 6 April 2016.

This migration cap would have led to thousands of Indian nurses having to return to India by 2020. The Indian Health ministry planned to target returning nurses with jobs with a better salary.

The British government’s U-turn in placing nurses on SOL has undermined the Indian Health Ministry’s attempts to address its own nursing crisis. The colonist attitude of stealing nursing staff continues. ■

press coverage and unlike in the medical profession there has been no opposition to this move by the UK nursing regulator, the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The medical profession has a two-year period to oppose the initiative. And the country as a whole might have the option of the referendum to leave the EU before this applies to doctors.

Niall Dickson, Chief Executive of the General Medical Council, speaking about the European professional card, said “... there are major weaknesses in the regulatory system and it must be right that every country in the EU should be able to check that doctors coming to work within their borders have the competency, skills and cultural understanding to treat its patients safely. We believe that the introduction of the European professional card for doctors would further jeopardise our ability to protect patients in the UK.”

The fight for the bursary for health care students cannot shy away from the wider context of the immoral and, as of January 2016, largely unregulated use of overseas staff. There is no shortage of British applicants for British health profession programmes – they are all oversubscribed. The real shortage lies in the absence of a government willing to produce a workforce for one of the country’s essential services. ■



## New research highlights the links between inequity in society, poverty and ill health...

# Sick of capitalism

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE London's Institute of Health Equity (IHE) is the world's leading authority on health inequalities. It is led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, author of *The Health Gap: the Challenge of an Unequal World* and President of the World Medical Association.

It's an institute that seeks to increase health equity through proposing policies to alter the social determinants of health. Every year it surveys health levels across England, known as the Marmot Indicators. The latest Marmot Indicators, published on 27 November, show not only that more people are poor and ill, but also hint at why.

The number of households unable to afford an acceptable standard of living has risen year by year from 19.1 per cent in 2008-09 to 24.4 per cent in 2012-13. More than half of all poverty is now found in working households.

The number of people reporting work-related illness has risen from 3,640 per 100,000 in 2011-12 to 4,000 in 2013-14, an increase of almost 10 per cent.

Deprivation has increased in areas across England: Hull, Derby, Westminster, Middlesbrough and Nottingham have suffered the largest increases.

### Sicker for longer

People are spending more years with a disability at every level of deprivation. Those in more deprived areas spend longer with a disability than those in less deprived areas. It is still the case that some people have many more years of ill health than others and that some people have much briefer lives than others. Men in the North East had 6.3 fewer years of healthy life expectancy than men in the South East. Women in the North East had 6.6 fewer years of healthy life expectancy than women in the South East.

Expected years in ill-health rated at birth increased between 2010-12 and 2011-13, from an average of 15.8 to 16.1 for males and from 18.9 to 19.2 for females in England as a whole. The figure ranged from 19.4 for males in Blackpool, the most deprived area on the 2015 classification, to 10.3 years in Wokingham, the least deprived. For females the respective



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Early child development matters hugely for subsequent health.

## 'The latest Marmot Indicators show that more people are poor and ill.'

figures were 21.8 and 14.8.

Early child development matters hugely for subsequent health and health equity. Good early child development is shaped by the environment in which children grow. But in surveys on child wellbeing in "rich" countries, Britain comes 16th of 21. (The USA comes 21st.) A local authority Children's Centre in Newham charged £850 a month for child care. By contrast, in Sweden, where child care is subsidised, the most you pay a month is £113.

Children from "disadvantaged families" (the Department for Education's terminol-

ogy) consistently achieved around 15 per cent lower rates of "a good level of development" by the end of the reception year.

Between 2012-13 and 2013-14, the attainment of at least 5 GCSEs or equivalent (including English and Maths) fell from 60.8 per cent to 56.8 per cent for all pupils. And it dropped from 38.1 per cent to 33.7 per cent for pupils eligible for free school meals. The gap in GCSE attainment between all pupils and those eligible for free school meals widened from 22.5 per cent in 2011-12 to 23.1 per cent two years later.

Unemployment in England gradually increased from 2005 to 2011, and decreased year on year to 2014. But the latest rate, at 6.2 per cent, is still higher than the 2008 level, 5.8 per cent. It was highest in Middlesbrough (12.5 per cent) and lowest in Hampshire (2.9 per cent).

*Continued on page 12*

*Continued from page 11*

There were 2.61 long-term Jobseeker's Allowance claimants per 1,000 population in 2008, up sharply to 7.1 in 2014. 15.9 per cent of people aged 19-24 are not in employment, education or training, more than in 2008 (15.7 per cent).

Nations enjoy better health when everybody can access high-quality medical care, regardless of ability to pay, and when there are good early child care and education, good working conditions, good conditions for older people and resilient communities.

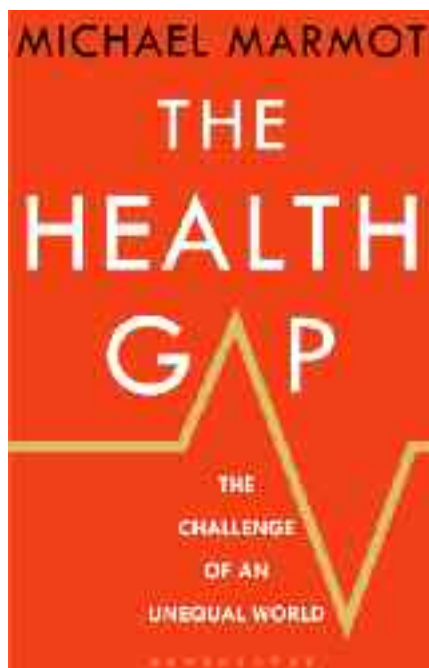
## Right to health

The right to health entails rights to equity in the social determinants of health. These are water and sanitation, food, housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions, health-related education and information, and available, accessible and good-quality health care services.

The Nordic countries achieve high levels of good health because they have universal social policies, not targeted, means-tested selective policies; welfare state redistribution policies; relatively narrow income inequalities; a stress on equality of opportunity and outcomes according to class and gender and for socially excluded groups; a broad scope of services provided mainly by the public sector at local level; and social spending and social protection.

But their achievements are not secure while they allow capitalism to survive. Finland's excellent education system is under threat, as are the fine welfare services of Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

**'Unemployment and the consequent damage to peoples' health have been the price paid for getting inflation down.'**



But why are people's health conditions so different? Why do some people live longer than others? In his recent book about the health gap, Marmot tried to answer these questions. His conclusion was that relative social disadvantage makes the great majority of us, other than the very richest, suffer worse health and live shorter lives than we could. Marmot summed up, "The more generous the social spending of a country, and the more universal, the lower is the national mortality rate."

## Spending and mortality

The World Health Organization's 2014 publication *Review of social determinants and the health divide in the WHO European Region* agreed: "the greater the government social expenditure, the lower the mortality." The WHO's Commission on Social Determinants of Health affirmed in its 2008 report *Closing the gap in a generation*: "Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale." Lower welfare spending makes people's health worse and causes unnecessarily early deaths.

Marmot noted that Norman Lamont when Chancellor of the Exchequer said, "Rising unemployment and the recession

have been the price that we have had to pay to get inflation down. That price is well worth paying." Marmot commented that Lamont could have said, but didn't, "Rising unemployment and the consequent damage to people's health have been the price that we have had to pay to get inflation down. That price is well worth paying."

Overall economic policies directly affect our health. The IHE has shown, as Marmot observed, that "The idea that unbridled free markets in everything (the so-called Washington Consensus) is the way for countries to grow, develop and ensure better health and greater health equity is contradicted by the evidence."

Marmot further noted, "There is a serious failure of global financial governance when the interests of hedge funds, legally if not morally, trump the ability of nations to decide their own future." Capitalist interests override national sovereignty and democracy. So nations need to control and develop their own resources and to override capitalist interests. Capitalism's drive for profit overrides every human need. We have to reorder society so that the drive for profit does not override every human need.

## Social determinants

Marmot admitted that he had an ideology: that "avoidable health inequality, health inequity, was the deepest injustice in our society." Medicine, doctors, all of us, should deal with the conditions that cause this health inequity. What are these conditions, the social determinants of health? What causes the relative social disadvantage that damages our health?

The answer is clear: inequity in power, money and resources causes health inequity. And what causes this inequity in power, money and resources? The tiny minority capitalist class monopolises power, money and resources in Britain today. The socio-economic system of capitalism causes this inequity of power and resources and so causes health inequity.

To end this inequity and bring about the health equity we want, we have to take power away from this capitalist class. And that won't happen without the working class taking responsibility for running society. ■

**With a new law attacking membership and finances, we need organisation – and clarity of thinking...**

# How to defeat the Bill

THE FASCISTIC Trade Union Bill is currently going through Parliament and will shortly become law. It represents the logical next step for capitalism in Britain, aimed as it is to snuff out working class resistance to the government's agenda of driving down pay, smashing public services, and rolling back gains made over many decades of struggle.

If the Bill is passed it could devastate membership levels and therefore union finances. It will severely limit the ability of unions to take effective and lawful industrial action. It will further undermine health and safety at work. And it will dramatically increase the ability of the state to directly interfere in the affairs of the unions. No organised working class opposition is to be tolerated. This is what fascism looks like. Except this time the thugs are in parliament, not on the streets.

The assault on membership and union finances is a particularly effective line of attack. With many unions already in financial straits, this Bill could prove fatal to some.

As a class and a trade union movement we have thought we could live with capitalism. We told the employers that unions were good for capitalism, and many unions came to believe this nonsense. It was a unilateral ideological disarmament.

The disarmament was practical as well. One example: unions blissfully placed themselves at the mercy of the employers by ending the practice of having shop stewards collect union dues in the workplace and moving to check off (see Box 1, page 14).

Employers actually make a tidy profit from handling this workers' money. They charge the unions for providing a subscription collection service – and often keep the money back for months, earning interest on it before handing it over. And they quite like to know who the union members are.

Unions that overcome the challenges to their membership and money would also be

**'This is what fascism looks like. Except this time the thugs are in parliament.'**



Workers

**TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady at the lobby of parliament on 2 November. But stage-managed rallies and appeals to Westminster will not do the job.**

faced with massive difficulties in mounting any sort of effective lawful industrial action.

Industrial action will only be lawful if more than half those eligible to vote actually do so. There will be six specified sectors ("important public services") in which special provisions will apply. For the ballot to be legal, 40 per cent of all members will need to vote in favour, with anyone not voting being counted as a vote against.

These are precisely the areas in which recent industrial action has been most

effective, such as the railways and the ambulance service. And teachers will doubtless reflect on the fact that they provide an "important public service", something clearly not reflected in their pay.

And since the aim is to stop all industrial action, how long will it be before the threshold is raised – to 60 per cent? 70 per cent?

Yet, many union ballot results have been less than convincing. Industrial action held

*Continued on page 14*

# 1: Caught in the check off trap

RAIL UNIONS learned just how vulnerable their finances were many years ago when British Rail summarily ended the check-off facility to RMT during a dispute in 1993, depriving that union of an income stream of £500,000 a month. As a result, even after the dispute ended and British Rail resumed check off, the rail unions persuaded many members to pay by direct debit instead (although many still pay through check off).

But the warning went unheeded in the wider union movement. And since the government ended check off in the civil service earlier this year – as the employer, it needed no legislation – as part of its attack on the main civil service union PCS, the consequences have been devastating.

Already weakened by ultra-leftism, division and poor workplace organisation, and already under heavy financial pressure, PCS was vulnerable. In the scramble to retain members by switching them from check-off to payment by direct debit, the union has lost a third of its members in a few months. It is now barely able to function, and cannot afford to fund its confer-

ence or internal elections.

The Bill now seeks to extend this assault to all of the public sector, and thereby attack all unions that organise in publicly owned employers. It is no coincidence these are the areas with have by far the highest density of union membership.

The NHS, councils, devolved governments, schools, all would be affected. It would affect transport – Network Rail and London Underground are both public sector companies, as are a number of bus companies. And it is looking likely that the provisions could be applied to the private sector companies that run so many public services on a privatised or outsourced basis. The impact on unions such as Unison, NUT and UCU, not to mention Unite and the GMB, can only be imagined.

Anyone who believes that these provisions will not be extended to all unions everywhere if successfully applied to the public services is living in cloud cuckoo land. Without money, unions would be forced to rethink what they are for and how to function. They shouldn't wait to be forced. ■

*Continued from page 13*

on the back of very low turnouts has simply played into the government's hands.

The lack of genuine member participation leads to rhetoric replacing thinking,

mechanistic tactics replacing strategy, empty gestures – and failure. There's a clear lesson: any union that thinks it can start a fight, and win it, with fewer than half its members taking part in a ballot needs to carry out a serious reality check.

Unlike now, unions will have to specify their intended action on the ballot paper. Unions will need to give 14 rather than 7 days' notice of industrial action, and the mandate of the ballot will last for only four months. All the employer will have to do is drag out negotiations and force the union to re-ballot – a further massive cost. And employers will be able to draft in agency workers to substitute for striking staff.

Unions mounting pickets outside workplaces will have to appoint "picket supervisors" who will be required to carry a letter of authorisation which must be presented upon request to the police or "to any other person who reasonably asks to see it". They must also be identifiable by wearing an armband or badge. Failure to comply will mean costly fines to the union. These provisions will simply encourage those employers (aided by the police) that have blacklisted union activists.

## Facility time

The paid "time off" or facility time given to shop stewards and union reps by public sector employers is also under attack; it will be strictly limited. "Time off" is a term that is seemingly designed to suggest to other workers that union reps and stewards are work-shy skivers. It will particularly affect health and safety representatives – and hence make workplaces more dangerous.

All public sector employers will have to publish information on the costs of time off for reps, plus a breakdown of what the facility time has been used for. More ammunition for the likes of the so-called Taxpayers'



**CPBML/Workers**

**Public Meeting, London**

**Thursday 11 February, 7.30 pm**

**“The War on Workers: How to Turn the Tide”**

**Brockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square,  
London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.**

In the face of capitalism's blitzkrieg on workers, our class needs to radically change and refresh its thinking – to realise it can rejoin class struggle and take Britain forward. Come and discuss how. All welcome.

Alliance to demand further curbs.

The state will have unprecedented powers of intervention in union affairs through the Certification Officer – a role brought in by Thatcher (see Box 2, right). They will be given powers to investigate unions and access membership databases even if no one has made a complaint. They can impose fines on unions of up to £20,000. And unions will be charged for the privilege.

The response of the TUC has been a pathetic “Defend the right to strike” campaign, which relies on convincing the House of Lords to water the Bill down. This shows just how poor their understanding is of what this Bill is about.

There is no “right to strike”. British statute and common law do not, and never have acknowledged such a right. A right is only real when it is exercised, not when it exists in statute.

And neither will the EU come riding to our rescue. Not one piece of EU legislation protects collective bargaining or strike action – the much vaunted EU Charter of Fundamental Rights refers to negotiations and strikes, but only in accordance with “national laws and practices”. So much for “Social Europe”!

Our ruling class has knocked us down through the onslaught on industry, privatisation and the fragmentation of work. Now we’re on the floor they are coming to kick us. Appeals to their better nature, lobbying them in their front room, the Palace of Westminster, will not avail us.

Workplace organisation, assiduously applied in pursuit of winnable and necessary demands, remains our route to progress. The solution lies with workers, and with workers alone.

As *Workers* said in the September/October issue, trade unions have to get off their knees and blow the dust out of their heads. Unions are attacked because they exist to make inroads into capitalism’s profits. The war between the employing class and the working class will not stop just because some in our movement wish to surrender, or seek some futile compromise.

So shake off the ideological shackles. Renew our unions on the basis of real involvement, stop seeing the employers as conduits for union dues, re-assert our class interests and get on with organising. That way lies the path to “Kill the Bill” – and to the survival of the working class. ■

## 2: Half a century of attack



**1974: Engineers ready to defend the AUEW headquarters in Peckham against sequestration. Reg Birch is front, second from left.**

“KILL THE BILL!” was the slogan adopted by trade unions more than forty years ago, in opposition to the Industrial Relations Bill, a Bill which became an Act, and which came perilously close to being accepted in toto by British trade unions. The struggle against it was led by the AUEW, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, whose fight was in turn led by the renowned Communist, and founder of our Party, Reg Birch. (See “Workers against the state”, *Workers*, July/August issue.)

More than 40 years later the slogan is raised again, this time applied to the Trade Union Bill. But capitalism and its governments have learned many lessons since then. And the world of work is a different place. In the 1970s there were more than twice as many union members as now.

More importantly there were many more active union members. In sum, the level of class consciousness was qualitatively more advanced back then.

Capitalism’s attack was different too. It represented an attempt to establish a court (the National Industrial Relations Court) which could directly intervene in the running of unions. That this was such an affront to organised workers shows how far we have regressed. The very idea that the law of the land should be used as a

weapon in the employers’ hands against unions was decried in almost all union headquarters. Now it is as equally widely accepted. But back then, the courts were defeated.

Enter Thatcher. Her approach (especially significant considering the fact that she was a lawyer) was not to use the courts against the unions. Not in the first instance anyway. The blitzkrieg would be the destruction of the industry in which unions were based and had their strength. First steel, then pits, then docks, then print, then engineering and other forms of manufacture, were, literally, blitzed.

All the places with high union membership were attacked. Then laws were introduced. Gradually the law of the (capitalist) land encroached. The Certification Officer was introduced and strengthened; ballots were enforced, not just for the election of union leaders, but in the conduct of industrial action. Employers were given time to organise their response to action, the workers’ blow being telegraphed like that of a bad boxer.

After the initial resistance (largely, aside from the NUM, putative) all weakness was pounced upon. As union membership fell because of industrial destruction, the noose tightened, the law made ever more draconian. ■

**Deliberate policies from successive governments have turned us to finance imports and mortgages.**

# Why the deficit is being

SINCE 1945 Britain's economy has regularly seen economic upturn, boom, and then market correction followed by recession. Many workers assumed that after the crisis of 2007 to 2008, we would see the same pattern. Seven years later there is nothing on the horizon resembling an upturn.

In fact Britain has been increasingly a debtor country for most of the last 30 years. Alongside the closure of our factories, it has been deliberate government policy to run a trade deficit. Capitalist apologists since 1979 have said that this didn't matter. They claimed that the monthly balance of trade shortfall could be covered by importing foreign capital, laughably described as "inward investment". What this meant was that to acquire manufactured imports to replace what we could no longer produce domestically, Britain first had to borrow and import foreign capital. This was not investment for the future.

## Foreign credit

Foreign credit has not only been used to purchase imported goods, it has also been used to finance domestic mortgages. The rise in British house prices over the years has had less to do with the demand and supply of housing and more to do with the volume of available credit.

Workers have been able to bid up the price of housing. The worker with access to the most credit (mortgage) can notionally secure the particular house on offer. Subsequent mortgage repayments are then recycled back to the creditor country of origin through British retail banks either acting as middlemen or as a part of a syndicate.

**'The credit card trick of apparently propping up living standards while de-industrialising Britain is shown up as a pathetic lie.'**

In effect international credit, whether used to secure imports or to inflate house prices, has fuelled a classless political fantasy in the minds of many British workers. All the while at the macro-economic level our total consumption as a national working class has been greater than our total domestic production; as a class we have no gross savings. In the end making and producing things in a country which controls its own resources does matter.

The credit card trick of apparently being able to prop up living standards while de-industrialising Britain is now shown up as a pathetic lie. But on his appointment in 2013 Mark Carney, our Canadian Governor of the Bank of England, said he believed our credit cards are not "maxed out yet".

So what happened in 2007-08? Before the crisis, credit in Britain had reached the equivalent of five times our annual GDP and bank interest rates had risen to around 5.25 per cent. The fantasy that all it needed to balance the books was the continuous import of capital just fell apart. The erosion of national production and our industrial base was a problem after all, although government and capitalist apologists will never acknowledge it.

A large slice of what had become unsustainable debt in 2007 has since been transferred from the private banking sector to the government's public accounts. Now labelled National Debt, it has increased more than threefold since the crisis. In 2007 that debt was £442 billion; it rose to £1,033 billion in 2011 and £1,427 billion in 2015.

## Switched

That implies almost £1 trillion of mostly private sector banking debt (£1,427 billion less £442 billion) has so far been switched to the public using various devices.

The annual gross domestic product for the whole of the UK is in the region of £2.8 trillion. In other words, about one-third of the total production of goods and services created by workers in one year has been used to acquire bank debts.

Yet parliamentarians have thrown up an austerity smokescreen. They say that our ever increasing National Debt is unsustainable and by implication that our public services are unsustainable too.



Cash machines, Poultry, in the City of London. The c

Linda Steward/Stockphoto.com

Another revealing feature is the way the National Debt is broken down. About £418 billion of the current £1,427 billion total is provided by foreign concerns.

Does this matter? Of course it does, because it means those foreign creditors can have first pickings of whatever is offered up by the government for privatisation. Recent examples have been the Post Office, the Scottish Rail network (sponsored by the SNP but with the connivance of



turned Britain into a debtor country, with foreign credit used

# dumped on us



continuous import of capital is not the way to rebuild Britain.

Westminster) and the selling off of government owned property in Central London.

Those creditor countries and foreign concerns which have put up the credit are not named in public records. They have proxy accounts instead. The reason for the lack of transparency is the influence they exert on British government policy. Beneficiaries of privatisation at knockdown prices would be easy to identify if the creditor organisations were named in public.

This concealment no doubt explains the recent bizarre decision by the BBC to only consider bids to provide weather forecasting services from a Dutch-connected private equity concern or from the New Zealand Met Office, at the exclusion of the British Met Office. The government's involvement in the BBC seems to be at the behest of Dutch and New Zealand interests.

Of the balance of National Debt, £375 billion has been covered by printing money,

courtesy of the Bank of England. The remaining £634 billion is held by institutions acting as custodians for British workers' savings in pensions for example. In effect the assets that back workers pensions have been earmarked as expendable. Events in other debtor countries such as Greece show how this can be done in Britain at a convenient date in the future.

All the while corporation tax paid by large companies on their declared profits has fallen. Since 2007 the government has cut the rate from 28 per cent to 20 per cent. This is a long-term policy. Over the past 36 years the corporate tax rate has fallen from 52 per cent and is planned to drop to 18 per cent over the next five years.

The government says it wants to "pay down the deficit". In reality it seeks to dump its problems on to workers and call it austerity. Is the theory of austerity new? And if not has it ever reversed capitalist decline? The short answer to both questions is "No". It isn't new, and it exacerbates decline. The historical experience from the period 1914 to 1945 is that austerity is a precursor to war and revolutions.

## Purchasing power

What the gospel of austerity tries to overlook is that it is the purchasing power of the working class in the form of wages that sets the limit to what capitalism can sell. But austerity, in an attempt to prop up dwindling profits, seeks to lower the wages of the working class while maintaining or increasing prices. This further reduces the amount that capitalism can sell, causing the slump to deepen.

Attempts to solve the capitalist crisis through austerity are similar to the handling of many other economic problems in Britain. These result in a host of contradictory outcomes all designed to politically oppress the working class.

This cycle will continue until workers stop looking at the surface appearance of things and instead start to look at what lies below the surface and the benefits gained by bringing things to the fore. At present we as workers are free to sell our labour power – and we are free of any other means of gaining wealth. In a recession that does not feel like freedom. ■

In an exclusive interview with *Workers*, two veteran Cuban communists and trade unionists visited Britain – Rosita Fonseca, a founder member of the Cuban Women's Federation, and Pedro Ross, former General Secretary of the CTC, the Cuban Workers Central Union Federation (the equivalent of our TUC). Both veterans of the Cuban revolution, they found time in between speaking engagements at the TUC International Forum in Newcastle and Unison in London to talk to *Workers*. What they said provided a fascinating insight into the operation of workers' democracy in Cuba, the future now that diplomatic relations have been restored with the US, and how Cuba sees the European Union. These responses are mainly from Pedro Ross.

## EXCLUSIVE Cuba, the union

IN OCTOBER two leading Cuban communists and trade unionists visited Britain – Rosita Fonseca, a founder member of the Cuban Women's Federation, and Pedro Ross, former General Secretary of the CTC, the Cuban Workers Central Union Federation (the equivalent of our TUC). Both veterans of the Cuban revolution, they found time in between speaking engagements at the TUC International Forum in Newcastle and Unison in London to talk to *Workers*. What they said provided a fascinating insight into the operation of workers' democracy in Cuba, the future now that diplomatic relations have been restored with the US, and how Cuba sees the European Union. These responses are mainly from Pedro Ross.

*Is this your first visit to Britain – and how have you found it?*

This is not our first visit. But this visit in particular has helped us to meet people from sectors such as the trade unions, such as the CPBML, other sectors of British society, and to have a contact with the society on the streets. It has surpassed our expectations, including contact with the leadership of the Communist Party, via the Chairman. We have also met other comrades and union leaders. We have met young people, people concerned with the problems of today and the problems of the future. And we have also spoken to senior citizens who are still active such as [former NUPE general secretary] Rodney Bickerstaffe.

It has been very much a working holiday. For us as communists, these are the kind of holidays we have – contacting people, exchanging ideas, outside of the context in which we live this has been the best vacation.

*What do you see as the role of trade unions in Cuba?*

For the first time in history, the unions in Cuba have been beside the government and the people. It is a working class government, and for the first time unions in Cuba have been empowered.

Before the revolution, in different periods, when the unions had some legal status, there were trade unionists who were communists, who had people elected as mayors, members of parliament and in other posts. But it was intermittent and rare. Now, since the revolution, we have union members who at the same time are members of parliament, elected like everyone else. For example, I was an MP for 30 years, elected in various places and constituencies, including when I was ambassador in Angola (I was elected for a municipality in Cuba called San Miguel del Padron, in Havana).

We trade unionists have been elected because of the rights and will of the workers. The Communist Party does not nominate candidates [for parliament, etc]. Candidates are nominated by the mass organisations such as the trade unions, the Cuban Women's Federation, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, the National Association of Farmers, the Federation of University Students, the Federation of Middle Level Students...

The party does not present candidates for elections in the unions either. We have open floor meetings, with direct elections.

Elections to our parliament begin at the level of the constituencies. The neighbours get together and have an open meeting [where they] will propose candidates. But the candidates must belong to and live in that constituency. Then they go to a direct secret ballot. Delegates to the municipal posts are also elected according to that process. Half of the national parliament is proposed directly by the constituencies, and each of the organisations previously mentioned will nominate the remainder.

Trade union representatives [who are

**'The party does not present candidates for elections in the unions.'**



Workers

**Rosita Fonseca and Pedro Ross with Rodney Bickerstaffe in the room in which Lenin produced the revolutionary manifesto. The room belonged to Georgy Dimitrov, leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.**

elected to parliament] have a twofold mission: to represent the workers, and to represent those who elected them to the parliament. So as an MP they would periodically have to render account of their work – not to the trade unionists but to those who elected.

In Cuba, not all the trade union leaders are party members. But they are very prestigious individuals in the working collective, and they are revolutionaries. I'll tell you a small story. When I was elected as the Secretary General of the CTC on 28 January 1990, I addressed the Congress

# Communists give a fascinating insight into the view from ns, and the world



Staff in the Marx Memorial Library – in the journal *Iskra*. (The coat in the background is the Communist International in the 1930s.)

[which had 2,450 delegates, and about 1,000 foreign guests]. In my report I said the following: “Not all those who are here as a delegate are communists” – trying to explain that the congress was not made up of trade union leaders who are communists.

Fidel [Castro] made the final summing up, and he was mainly addressing the foreign guests here, and he said, “I must rectify something that Pedro said in his report: not all the delegates attending here belong to the Communist Party, but all of them however are communists because of

the way they act and because of their conduct and behaviour towards the revolution.”

*With the restoration of diplomatic relations with the USA, how do you think things will change for Cuba?*

In the first place, we are not even halfway [to normal diplomatic relations], we are just taking the first steps. As the Cuban revolutionary government has said, there is no normalisation of relations as long as there is a blockade. Very faint steps have been taken. There is a lot of international noise. Some people even say that the blockade is over. But the blockade is still there – it has not been moved one inch.

If there were to be normal relations, the United States should return the territory that they have occupied illegally against the will of the Cuban people – illegal because it is against the people and the government. We are talking about the Guantanamo naval base.

We will not normalise relations as long as the Cuban Adjustment Act is in place, a law that says that any Cuban who arrives – sailing, swimming, by any means – to the coast of the US and sets foot on American soil immediately will receive residence. It is a law intended to subvert Cuba, to create contradictions on the island, and to encourage people to flee the country by illegal means, which endangers their lives.

Cubans who defect from the island to the US are the only ones in the world who enjoy such privileges. Think for one minute if the Americans did this for the Mexicans, or the Haitians, or the people from the Dominican Republic – or the Syrians.

*How does Cuba see the role of the European Union?*

In terms of the EU and the world, the European Union has joined the adventures of the US in invading Iraq and Libya, so they have created a disaster in the adventures of the Bush administration, and Obama has also participated...European troops have been engaged, NATO has

**‘No normalisation of relations while there is a blockade.’**

participated and has provided support.

With regard to the exodus of migrant people, the European countries have not agreed how to handle the situation...and the exodus has to do with the imbalances created by imperialism and the appearance of the extremist forces and Islamic State. This has created imbalances in the world.

However, in spite of the joint position of the European Union, when you go to the UN and to the vote in the General Assembly, the countries comprising the European Union have voted in favour of Cuba. And the EU has been changing its attitude towards Cuba. For example the Ministers of Foreign Relations of several countries, including the French and Spanish foreign ministers, have recently visited Cuba, and high-ranking officials from the EU [as well].

The US and the EU are allies in all their actions. In my understanding this alliance between the US and the EU goes against the interest of the Europeans, because they have been joining the adventures of the US, using the resources of the Europeans, of the people, of the taxpayer.

Finally, the blockade, which is very important. The US...believes that the method that it has been using for promoting changes in Cuba has failed for the past 55 years, and that it should derail Cuba by other means. We are and will always be aware of the purposes of the US and we know that they have not changed.

*Any final words?*

Greetings to all who read your magazine! We express gratitude towards the workers by way of Unison and the TUC, Cuba Solidarity Campaign and the CPBML and other people in politics and society for the solidarity provided to us in difficult times. ■

**A talk at the Free Thinking Festival in Gateshead shows we can use low-carbon energy to keep the lights on...**

# Energy: we know how



Si-take at ja.wikipedia

**Matsukawa geothermal station in Japan. Projects on geothermal power in Britain came to a halt after the global financial crisis of 2008.**

WE HAVE the expertise to produce low- and no-carbon energy in large quantities safely from our own resources underground. So says Paul Younger, Professor of Energy Engineering at Glasgow University, interviewed\* by Jim al-Khalili at the Free Thinking Festival held at Sage Gateshead in November.

Speaking in the same week as the government announced the closure of all coal-fired power stations, Professor Younger has a better-informed, longer-term and at the same time more urgent approach to what happens next. Urgent he says because the lights may go out if we have a harsh winter due to the “crazy way we’ve organised the regulation of our energy”, allowing electricity generating capacity to drop dramatically.

Professor Younger is more than an academic. In 1992 Michael Heseltine wanted to close the whole northern coalfield within two weeks. Using his knowledge of hydrology

and extensive experience, Younger looked into it and advised that would cause the “single greatest incident of acidic mine drainage in history”. He has been consulted worldwide on preventing contamination from mine closures.

Now Professor Younger concentrates on new sources of energy “hidden away out of sight”, as he puts it. Our need for heat should be urgently addressed as it takes 40 per cent of the energy we use. At great depth every miner knows how hot it is. This geothermal energy, if developed, would make a significant low carbon contribution. It could be captured in many parts of the country by use of hydraulics and geochemistry and used to heat buildings. Younger’s projects in Britain were halted through a lack of funding after the global financial collapse.

## Coal without mining

Professor Younger is also an expert on underground coal gasification. Coal at great depths can be accessed without mining by using boreholes, partially oxidising it on site and piping the gas taken to a refinery to make the petrochemicals required for

**‘It is a big mistake to ignore the expertise that we have in Britain.’**

industry. There are “hundreds and hundreds of years worth” of it under the North Sea, very deep where no water ever seeped in.

Asked whether this has ever been tried, Younger said with a chuckle, “Like most of the great things it was invented in the north-east of England.” Sir William Ramsay was developing the idea in Durham in 1912. War stopped his work, but it was noted by Lenin, then in exile here and taken up in the Soviet Union.

From what we know about the geology and the amount of coal that would be removed during gasification, almost all the CO<sub>2</sub> produced can be put back into the great voids that would be created. Professor Younger says this process could be economical when oil prices go up. There are start up costs, and this is no panacea for our energy problems, but it could make a significant contribution for many years.

Professor Younger says it is a big mistake to ignore the breadth and depth of expertise that we have in Britain, which will disappear without employment. “We have a proud century of mining up to 15 miles out under the North Sea without ever a single case of sea water entering a mine.” As for engineering the use of new energy resources, “people who safely operated mines under the sea and the oil and gas industry in the North Sea” can do it. He wants to re-purpose those skills while we’ve still got them.

But he is not so optimistic about whether we’ll have the sense to do it: “we’ll probably throw in the towel on it as with most other British inventions, and buy, eventually, the products from this back from the Chinese.” Will lights still be on in 50 years? Yes, in Africa, he says. Here, probably – but not before they would have been off “for a canny while”. ■

\* The interview for *The Life Scientific* on BBC Radio 4 is available as a podcast at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06pb54j>

**Astronomic rises in house prices and rents, young teachers unable to live in the capital, a staffing crisis in the schools. Sounds familiar?**

# 1972–1974: The London Allowance campaign



**29 April 1974: London teachers on the march for a London Allowance.**

IN THE EARLY 1970s teaching staff turnover in London schools was running at a record 30 per cent annually – higher in certain areas. Young teachers were finding it nearly impossible to live in the capital. Living costs were huge and the burden of housing costs and fares was crippling.

House prices and rents were especially prohibitive for young teachers, who were the bulk of the teaching force. Houses in London cost 50 per cent more than in the provinces. Rents were equally high. Many young teachers were leaving the capital, resulting in teacher shortages and difficulties in running schools properly.

The London Allowance had been unchanged since 1970, and inflation was high. In May 1972, an arbitration tribunal said the allowance should rise on 1 November. But then the Conservative government imposed a wage freeze from that

month.

At the time teachers still enjoyed collective bargaining through the Burnham Committee, which brought together representatives of the employers and the teacher unions. When teachers put their case for a £300 allowance (up from £112), the leader of the management panel said they were substantially in agreement with the arguments.

## Intervention

Everyone seemed confident an agreement would have been made. But the Secretary of State intervened, dictating a paltry offer in keeping with the wage freeze. Teachers knew that the government had deliberately manoeuvred negotiations into the period of the wage freeze.

The NUT Action Committee called for a half-day strike of all London teachers on 23 November against the government's deci-

sion to prevent the Burnham Committee from making a realistic offer for the London Allowance.

At a meeting at Westminster Central Hall called jointly by London NUT bodies, more than 1,000 London teachers had overwhelmingly voted in favour of the strike in defence of their living standards, their schools and the children in their care. It was well supported. Despite a train strike, more than 12,000 teachers marched on the day.

On 3 February 1973, the NUT Executive called further strikes in London schools. They aimed to persuade the government to allow free negotiations and to exclude the London Allowance from the national salary cap. London teachers were not prepared to accept an increase at the expense of their colleagues throughout the country. They

*Continued on page 22*

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knew the government was hoping to split London teachers from their colleagues.

A series of 3-day strikes took place in three waves during February and March 1973. The choice of participating schools was made according to the strongest results and returns in the ballots. Teachers rushed to join the NUT.

In the first wave, 1,360 teachers were withdrawn from 97 schools in outer London boroughs, who had balloted 91 per cent in favour; 79 schools were closed. The second wave focused on inner London, involving a greater number of teachers and schools. Strikes were staggered for maximum impact. Striking teachers took part in local campaigns to gain maximum publicity.

The third wave was held back to see if progress was made in talks. When nothing materialised, it went ahead at the beginning of March. 2,775 teachers came out in 212 schools affecting more than 83,500 children. All over London local marches and strike meetings were held and leaflets distributed. More than 2,500 striking teachers marched through central London.

### Pay freeze

Prime Minister Heath told the NUT the London Allowance must be subject to the pay freeze. In response, the NUT called a one-day strike of all London teachers on 22 March – involving 36,000 Inner London teachers, plus those outer London boroughs covered by the London Allowance payment. More than 20,000 teachers marched through central London in the biggest march of London teachers ever, before lobbying parliament. Nearly 1,500,000 children were affected. In the Inner London Education Authority area alone, 271 schools were closed and 291 were partially closed.

**‘The education service in London was nearing breakdown.’**

Despite the action and the worsening situation in schools, the government would not give ground. The NUT waited for a decision from the Pay Board.

The Council of the Inner London Teachers Association called on the NUT to support members who refused to carry out extra duties because of staff shortage. This was about to worsen in the 1973 autumn term because the school leaving age had just been raised to 16. Soon this tactic became an NUT national instruction to members and London schools were introducing part-time education for 20,000 students. The education service in London was nearing breakdown.

### No mention

When the Pay Board report finally appeared in late September, it failed to mention the London Allowance at all. Two government ministers had earlier advised the NUT to go to the Pay Board in the hope that the allowance would be treated as an anomaly to be rectified. Teachers were incensed. The government then asked the Pay Board to carry out an enquiry into all aspects of London Allowances for all public employees. But those findings were not due until the end of June 1974.

In October the teachers’ side and employers’ side of the Burnham Committee jointly asked Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher to introduce a special change to the Pay Code in view of the crisis in London schools. They pressed for an immediate and substantial increase in the teachers’ London Allowance. But Thatcher was intransigent; she had cast herself in the role of Nero, fiddling while London burned.

By the beginning of January 1974, about a third of inner London secondary schools were sending children home. The NUT was not prepared to accept the teacher shortage in London and continued refusing to cover unfilled vacancies. By the beginning of February, 31,000 children were being sent home each week. Leaflets were prepared for parents to explain why.

A Labour government took over in March 1974 but the new Cabinet had no willingness to solve the dispute. Employment Secretary Michael Foot addressing the NUT directly said, “I can’t



**NUT journal *The Teacher* documented the struggle.**

make an exception to you regarding the interim payment.”

At the NUT Easter Conference, Education Secretary Reg Prentice said, “London strikes will not move me”. An Executive motion called for a referendum of London members to find out for how long they were prepared to go on strike in support of the London Allowance claim. On 29 April London NUT members struck for a half day and lobbied parliament. 15,000 London teachers were on the march. Prentice did not meet with teachers at the lobby. The NUT referendum showed considerable willingness to take further action. But the NUT Action Committee reserved the possibility of action until after the release of the Pay Board Report at the end of June. By this time nearly 23,000 London teachers had already resigned their posts for the following academic year. The outflow of teachers and subsequent staff shortages showed no sign of easing.

At last, the Pay Board suggested two

# 6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

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London Allowance payments: £400 in inner London; £200 in outer London. But the inner London payment was restricted to within a 4 mile radius from Charing Cross, which would have excluded lots of teachers working for the Inner London Education Authority. Prentice on behalf of the government stipulated that any further negotiation at the Burnham Committee on the Pay Board's London Allowance recommendations must be on the basis of the "kitty principle". This outcome did not satisfy the NUT. In July another half day strike and lobby of parliament was held, with the threat of more industrial action in the autumn.

The teachers' panel of the Burnham Committee rejected the government "kitty" restriction and the NUT Action Committee prepared another referendum of London members to test the willingness to proceed.

## Offer at last

At a meeting of the Burnham Committee in September, the employers' side offered a three-tier London Allowance. This was £351 for 45,000 teachers working in the London core – all of the area in the Inner London Education Authority as well as teachers working in the six outer London boroughs of Barking, Brent, Ealing, Haringey, Merton, Newham; £261 for 36,500 teachers in the other outer London boroughs and £141 for 23,000 teachers working in fringe areas around the edge of London (this was a new area for the payment).

This offer broke the government's "kitty principle" by £8 million. It was a huge increase in the allowance – up to 300 per cent and over 200 per cent for the main areas.

Although the NUT referendum results for action had been promising, the NUT Executive called a Special Salaries Conference for 28 September. This voted to accept this offer and the new allowances were backdated. The two-year campaign of London teachers undoubtedly also affected national salary negotiations and the size of the 1975 Houghton review award.

Can teachers and others facing a similar dilemma today learn anything from this epic struggle? Many things have changed, but where the workforce is united surely something could be learned about good tactics. ■

**Our country is under attack. Every single institution is in decline. The only growth is in unemployment, poverty and war. There is a crisis – of thought, and of deed. The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist held its 16th Congress in November 2012, a coming together of the Party to consider the state of Britain and what needs to happen in the future. Here we set out briefly six Calls to Action for the British working class – for a deeper explanation, see [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).**

### 1: Out of the European Union, enemy to our survival

The European Union represents the dictatorship of finance capital, foreign domination. The British working class must declare our intention to leave the EU.

### 2: No to the breakup of Britain, defend our national sovereignty

Devolution, and now the threats of separation and regionalism, are all products of only one thing: de-industrialisation.

### 3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

Unions exist as working members in real workplaces or they become something else entirely – something wholly negative. Take responsibility for your own unions.

### 4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground

The fight for pay is central to our survival as a class, and must be central to the agenda of our trade unions.

### 5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future

The regeneration of industry in Britain is essential to the future of our nation. Our grand-parents, and theirs, knew this. We must now reassert it at the centre of class thinking.

### 6: Build the Party

The task of the Party is singular: to change the ideology of the British working class in order that they make revolution here.

### Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
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### CPBML

78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

email [info@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk)

twitter [@cpbml](https://twitter.com/cpbml)

[www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk)

phone 020 8801 9543



# What makes us safe

**'There is no easy formula for keeping Britain safe. But we do know what makes for a united working class...'**

IN THE "war against terror", British governments have wilfully ignored the best ways of fighting it. It won't be defeated by smart missiles or drones. It won't be defeated by toppling secular governments.

Since the shootings in Paris and San Bernardino, bizarre claims have been made about what sort of actions will make us safe. In the USA we have heard the gun lobby's call for even more guns, and from the British parliament, the claim that bombing Syria will make us "safer on the streets of Britain".

Those making these claims suffer from a unique form of blindness which prevents them seeing that the bombers who attacked the London transport network in 2005, or those doing the shooting in Paris and San Bernardino in 2015, were almost exclusively home grown. The London bombers were young Britons.

There is no easy formula for keeping Britain safe. But we do know what makes for a united working class. Workers get to know and understand each other in the workplace and build friendships. This means that joining with fellow workers in a trade union, and fighting for the defence of jobs and the right to work also make us safer.

The fight for conditions such as the right to breaks and to keep the canteen open is also a route to shared understandings. Eating lunch "al desko", or worse, a culture of not taking a break at all in the working day, damages individual and social health.

And we must ensure that English is the language of the workplace. 2015 saw accidents at work and at least one fatality in the construction industry, due to poor comprehension of English.

In health and social care disciplinary action was taken against workers speaking another language amongst themselves, thus

excluding patients, colleagues and students. The revised Code of Conduct for nurses and midwives published in 2015 has had to include, for the first time ever, a clause that it is a professional requirement to "be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English".

"Speaking a common language" is not just a turn of phrase. It is fundamental to safety and understanding each other. This means that every fight for adult literacy courses, English language courses, education in prisons or access to a comprehensive public library system, also contributes to our safety and mutual understanding.

We must stop and reverse the trend towards religious schools, which leads to segregation of children into separate tribes from early years to adulthood.

This can take the form of unregistered schools with poor environmental conditions, unqualified teachers and a narrow daily diet of rote learning, as in the case of the Islamic schools recently exposed in Birmingham, fundamentalist Christian schools, and similar reports of their Jewish equivalents in North London.

But the publicly funded state religious schools and the well equipped private religious schools are also part of this segregation. Their growth began under the Blair government and has accelerated and produced a degree of segregation not seen in the British education system in modern times.

Children do not see difference, why should adults impose it on them?

Working together, sharing a lunchbreak together, talking together, learning and playing together are building blocks of class unity. ■

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